

Benjamin Powers
Eagle Hill-Southport
214 Main St.
Southport, CT 06890

March 10, 2015

Re: SB 1054

To the Members of the Education Committee:

I am providing written testimony in support of Proposed Bill SB 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia. I provide testimony from four different perspectives: as a student who struggled in elementary school with reading, as an educator who has worked with dyslexic children for the past fifteen years, as a parent of a second grader enrolled in a Connecticut public school, and as a doctoral researcher, who is looking at the self-efficacy perceptions of students with dyslexia

I applaud the Committee for taking the important step of providing more concrete steps for teacher training programs to have enhanced requirements for providing teacher candidates with the information to help in the detection and recognition of, and evidenced-based instruction for students with dyslexia. While I fully support this bill, I wish to submit to the committee that it does not go far enough in providing the necessary supports to help all students learn best. Training in evidenced-based programs, like Orton-Gillingham, take considerable time and effort, yet it is incumbent on school leaders and teachers to be equipped to teach all of our students to read. Having seen students coming to our school from Connecticut public schools, as well as having a child enrolled in Connecticut public schools, I see that there is a strong demand for significantly more teacher training in evidence-based programs.

There is a preponderance of evidence that shows the results of the negative experiences dyslexic children currently have in schools. Dr. Sally Shaywitz of Yale University estimates that 15% of the US population has dyslexia or a similar language-based learning disability; more strikingly, it is estimated that 41% of the US prison population has dyslexia or a similar language-based learning disability. The proper identification of and remediation for students with dyslexia is straightforward, effective, and inexpensive. With proper intervention strategies, 75% of students with dyslexia can be reading at grade level within three years of the implementation of evidenced-based instruction in approaches like Orton-Gillingham.

Recently, there has been a significant amount of research focused on the strengths of dyslexics and the advantages they can bring to educational environments. The areas of dyslexia strengths are those that we desperately need in our 21st century economy.

Instead of marginalizing these children and setting them up for future failure, we can instead empower them and create opportunities for the greater community. To do so, we must build awareness, provide appropriate interventions, and create appropriate academic environments for these students to thrive.

We have huge bodies of research, including visual fMRI images, and more recently, as has been reported from Haskins Lab at Yale University, fMRS, which prove, without a doubt, that dyslexia exists and how dyslexic brains differ in their need for instruction. Some of the most respected educational institutions in the world, from Harvard and Yale to Georgetown and UCLA have top researchers working in this field, like Dr. Ken Pugh, Dr. Guinevere Eden, Dr. Fumiko Hoeft, and Dr. Albert Galaburda. We have research-based methodologies to teach reading effectively, which would make a huge difference in the lives of a significant number of children. Further, the approaches, interventions, and remediation strategies that work so well for students with dyslexia can also benefit the broader range of students in the classroom.

It is with a great sense of urgency that I respectfully request that you pass SB 1054, and I strongly urge the committee to investigate ways that you may improve the demands on teacher candidates to be prepared in the best way possible to educate students in the most effective manner possible.

In closing, in my work leading a school for students with learning disabilities, I see firsthand the impact of the damage done to so many young people when they are not identified and provided with appropriate remediation and accommodations. I thank you for considering my testimony so that there may be an immediate and important change in how we identify those students and the way in which instruction is provided to them.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "B. Powers", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Benjamin N. Powers